



# ***SAFETY ALERT 02-99***

**17th Coast Guard District  
Marine Safety Division  
Box 25517  
Juneau, Alaska 99802**

## **CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM**

MSO Anchorage	271-6725	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-244	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	235-3292

## **SINKING OF FISHING VESSEL WITH ONE LIFE LOST** **FAIRWEATHER GROUNDS, SOUTHEAST ALASKA**

**Background:** The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Fishing Vessel Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information to fishermen of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties.

**Incident:** A 54-ft longliner capsized and sank approximately 50 miles offshore off the Fairweather Grounds just before midnight on November 12. The vessel was fishing for halibut in heavy weather and while sailing for port was hit broadside by 20 ft waves, shifting the halibut catch and deck gear, and causing the vessel to list 30 degrees and take on water. The operator tried calling the Coast Guard (CG) on VHF Channel 16 with no response (too far offshore) but did not call on SSB radio that is monitored for offshore emergencies. The operator also activated the EPIRB and threw it over the side as the crew donned immersion suits then tried to reach the life raft that washed overboard. As the liferaft painter was not secured to the vessel it did not inflate. A crewmember tied off a rope to his waist and then to the vessel and dove in after the raft. The vessel sank a short time later and he was not seen again. The CG received the registered 406 EPIRB alert and contacted the vessel owner to gather information and verify the alert. Although weather conditions were beyond safe parameters to launch the CG helicopter, the aircraft deployed due to the high confidence of the vessel’s distress. The crew was found less than an hour later within 100 yards of the EPIRB. When the helicopter arrived on scene one crewmember turned on the light on his immersion suit and the helicopter crew was able to spot them immediately. Three crewmembers were rescued.

**Lessons Learned:** While the cause of the casualty is unknown, there are several lessons learned.

1. Before getting underway mariners should assess the current and forecast weather and assess the vessel’s condition to determine if the voyage can be safely conducted or should be delayed.
2. The proper securing of cargo and deck gear is critical for maintaining stability during heavy weather conditions. The shifting of fish or gear can quickly lead to disaster. The best time to ensure a vessel is properly “secured for sea” is before encountering heavy weather.
3. As evidenced by this case, a properly serviced and installed EPIRB and properly fitting and serviced immersion suits save lives. The crew attributed their AMSEA safety training with their familiarity with this equipment and their survival. Positive action to activate and deploy an EPIRB better ensures it sends a distress signal and is not caught up in the vessel’s rigging.
4. Operable personal marker lights on immersion suits greatly aid night searches.
5. Liferafts should be properly attached to a secure point on the vessel in accordance with manufacturer’s directions.
6. The vessel did not have a current CG dockside exam. The last exam was performed more than three years ago. These free exams, performed at the dock, help identify safety deficiencies that can lead to loss of vessels and/or the crew.